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FLOWER AND WEED

By

EDITH MIRICK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOHN C. ROGERS

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To

The Memory of One
who Taught me to Love Alike

THE FLOWER
AND
THE WAYSIDE WEED

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CONTENTS

PART I SPRING

Out of Flower, Sun and Tree 1
Spring (Pen Drawing) by John C. Rogers . . 3
Discrimination 5
Paths to Spring 6
Epithalamium 7
Gold 8
There Was a House 9
Once upon a Time 10
Amanda's Garden 11
Anne Rutledge 12
Yellow Butterfly 13
Meadow Bouquet 14
The Blue-Bird Has a Right to Nest . . . 16
Emma 17
For a Proud Lady 18
Robin's Call 19

PART II SUMMER

Summer (Pen Drawing) by John C. Rogers . 21
Interlude 23
Sunflower Hedge 24
Hill Songs 25
Garden Flower 26
Brief Gods 27
Prisoned Bird 28
Lines for a Blind Girl 29
Journey of Anger 30
The Deaf 31
Poet's Child 32
Portraits 33

Never Shall the Flames That Burn . . . 34
Much as Any God 35
Shadow 36
Envy 37

PART III AUTUMN

Autumn (Pen Drawing) by John C. Rogers . 39
Autumn Words 41
As Once to Pan 42
Country Walk 43
Gold Finches 44
Wash Day 45
Hill Man 46
Market Place 47
Feud 48
Mole 49
Now There Is Nothing Left to Tell . . . 50
Poplar 51
Armor 52
Ashes 53
Down in the Hollow 54
Rime 55

PART IV WINTER

Winter (Pen Drawing) by John C. Rogers . 57
Red Bird 59
Defiance 60
Potted Plant 61
Gold Fish 62
Lines for a Mouse 63
Aristocrat 64
Convivial 65
Caged Eagle 66

Steepled Fingers 67
Christmas Pine 68
I Try Remembering 69
Song for Winter 70
Windy Hill 71
Gall and Black Bread 72
Snow-Flake 73

Out of flower, sun and tree,
I shall make a God for me;
Out of moments, days and years,
Gall of sorrow, wine of tears;
Fashion him of old delight,
Scarlet dawn and stippled night;
Arrows of remembered pain,
Feathered wing, and drops of rain.
In the aisles of solitude,
Where but sun and wind intrude,
Through a woof of branch and sod,
I shall weave myself a God.

Spring

DISCRIMINATION

From a like womb
And similar seed,
There comes to birth
Flower and weed.

Impartially
The bees begot
Blue periwinkle,
Forget-me-not;

While goldenglow
Burns to the same
Exhorting sun
As sorrel flame.

From a like womb
And similar seed,
One born a flower,
One—a weed.

PATHS TO SPRING

I must not envy suns that blaze
In blue and vaulted upper ways.

The bulb must keep an eager pride,
A hungry green pressed tight inside;

And, led in blackness by a spark,
Cut paths to spring, thru yielding dark.

EPITHALAMIUM

Now spring has told the cherry tree
To don a marriage veil,
Has waked the drowsy laggard bee
To brew the wedding ale;

And, humming tunes as old as earth,
Incautiously he goes,
To murmur tales of love and birth
With pollen-dusted nose.

A million airy vows are sealed,
As wing and petal mate;
An ancient scheme of earth revealed,
Becomes articulate;

As, on from bride to willing bride,
The grooms of beauty hum
A song of earth, age-multiplied,
Spring's epithalamium.

GOLD

Fragile and fleeting
Is its hour,
Like fields of dandelion,
One day in flower . . .
Then grisly four-o-clocks
That drift to death,
Blown windward
By the puffing of a breath.

THERE WAS A HOUSE . . .

There was a house—I know not where,
But Goosie Gander climbed the stair,
And wandered, aimless, here and there.
I lived in the house, I know not where.

Out in the garden, from the wall,
Humpty Dumpty had his fall . . .
Why, I do not know at all;
I know he fell from the garden wall.

Over the wall and far away,
Gleamed in the sun, the stack of hay,
Where Boy Blue fell asleep one day,
Out over the hills—and far away!

Perhaps the house was in the street,
That echoed to swift running feet,
The day the Piper's Son was beat;
I think that the house was in that street.

It may be it was in the town,
Where Willie Winkie ran up and down,
Scantily clad in his night-gown.
I dream that the house is in that town.

The key is lost—long, long ago!
I seek the house, but I do not know
The path—the years have hid it so;
And the key is lost . . . in the long ago.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Giant-Killer

I dug a hole in a garden where
I wait for the giant—old despair;

With bough and green leaf covering it,
No eye but my own may see the pit;

Gaunt black branches and foliage bent
To smiling cover of false content.

But I must be wary what I do,
For fear that my own feet blunder through.

Bean-Stalk

Because I cannot use their eyes,
They call me dull, the blinded wise,

Knowing the madman by his deed:
I traded comfort for a seed.

But what is meat and what is wine,
To call of a sky-seeking vine?

For, by its tendrils small and frail,
I put my hand on heaven's rail.

AMANDA'S GARDEN

Amanda's garden
(She must have been to blame)
Flared up at springtime,
Like wayward flame.

Amanda was reproachless
And definitely chaste,
But wanton tiger-lilies
Blazed at her waist.

At a kitchen window,
Which should have been quiet,
Hollyhocks threatened
Incendiary riot;

And by the ash-can,
Abode of vanished fire,
Goldenglow at autumn,
Burned like new desire;

While by the gate,
Where swains were wont to linger,
Rose bushes beckoned,
With a blood-red finger.

Something must be wrong,
All the neighbors said,
With a girl who likes so much
Yellow and red.

ANNE RUTLEDGE

The thought of the snow and rain on her grave fills me with indescribable grief. Abraham Lincoln.

Winter he missed; but knew the summer's warm
  Fulfilled maturity, the solemn weight
Of ripened fruit, the harvest and the storm,
  After the spring had left him desolate.
She was the petaled bough of early years,
  Whose fragile beauty made brief heaven his;
The voice that tuned abstracted busy ears
  To unforgotten haunting melodies.

She was the branch that knew belated snow,
  Wind-scattered petals in a leafing lane,
Gathered to earth with Aprils long ago,
  One with resurgent loveliness. Oh, rain,
Weep quietly for thwarted blossoming;
  And snow, lie lightly on the grave of spring.

YELLOW BUTTERFLY

To a Little Girl in a Garden

Spring came early to the old house across the way.
It was on a branch, near her window,
That the red-bird flamed, and broke dawn's quiet
With his flute, inveighing
Against her slumber, while he watched, swaying,
Beside her pane, for a glimpse of cobalt skies,
And the quick incredible gold of the sunrise.

I used to watch her as she flitted
About the old garden, like a yellow butterfly;
In and out the arched door, fitted
With great brass knocker; through the delapidated
Wall of the worn box-hedge;
Peering between the palings of the solemn-gated
Picket-fence; skipping the moss-grown
Crooked walks of brick;
Singing . . . calling . . . dancing, always alone;
One with the perfume of lavender,
The color of larkspur and bush-rose; and the sun
About the dark place, went in and out with her.

Spring comes late now to the old house
Across the way. The red-bird seeks another garden,
Knowing that in a window the sun will not rise
To the sound of blue glinting laughter . . .
There are some eyes
Too proud for tears— But April will not restrain
Her grief, coming to weep quietly
Over an old garden . . . down a darkened pane.

MEADOW BOUQUET

Blue-Eyed Grass

Down the meadow way,
Seeing me only,
Those on the road say:
"She walks lonely."

Grass is all they see,
The wide field over . . .
Not eyes raised to me
From the clover.

Bluets

Careless searcher,
With the eye
Gazing upward
To the sky;

Looking—looking
Overhead,
Seeking carpets
Heaven-spread:

Blindman—blindman,
Here they lie,
On the grass
As you go by.

Star-Grass

Midnight heaven
Could not hold
All its treasured
Miser-gold.

It has scattered
On the way;
Spilled upon
The road of day.

So be wary
As you pass,
Lest you crush stars
In the grass.

THE BLUE-BIRD HAS A RIGHT TO NEST

I must not hate the April day
That brings to life the barren clod,
Nor deprecate the golden way
The crocus travails thru the sod.

Resentment is a childish thing
Against an eager tasseled tree,
That strives alone to please the spring
Without a thought of wounding me.

The blue-bird has a right to nest
And raise a chirping azure brood;
The spring can find no interest
Nor patience for an autumn mood.

EMMA

She was growing old,
And found it difficult to thread needles.
In the early days of spring,
When the sun was calling the garden into life,
When the air, just turning warm,
Filled my blood with similar delicious stirring,
Emma sat by the window,
Patiently ruffling crisp rose-colored ruffles;
Tucking leafy tucks, gathering sprigged skirts,
Stitching . . . stitching . . . stitching!

Now and again, I would hear the call:
"Please come thread the needle for Emma!"
A plague on old women! Age was inexcusable.
Anyone could see the eye of a needle;
It was very plain.
So Emma, hired by the hour, sat by the window
And sewed in the spring,
Stitching . . . stitching . . . stitching,
That youth might have its ordained hour
Of rose ruffles, green tucks, sprigged skirts.

Emma is long gone.
So is the youth she decked in frills and ribbons.
Now I sit soberly of spring days by the window,
Stitching . . . stitching. . . .
Rose-colored ruffles, green tucks, sprigged skirts.
Youth is still needing them.
Perhaps the eyes of needles are growing smaller,
Or the light more dim. A plague on all needles!
Must I call? (*Emma, Emma!*)

FOR A PROUD LADY

There is this much to level us, aloof
  Though you may be: at last a common roof;
Where, proselyte to creed of flowering,
  Each shall be bound, the servitor of spring.

We both shall learn to fashion out of mould,
  The purple orchid and the marigold;
And, by a craftsmanship unscaled or barred,
  The herb and garlic for the poor man's yard.

Together we shall arm the shaggy pine,
  And tie the scarlet wings of columbine
To swaying tether; scattering the cool
  White cups of lilies on the vacant pool.

In consummation of the bloom from seed,
  We two shall blend, as April has decreed . . .
With little left for each to lose or gain,
  But old commodities of sun and rain.

ROBIN'S CALL

Sedately in a winding sheet,
Lay me where you will;
I will lie with folded hands,
Still—so still.

But if, at spring, a robin's call
Sound above my head,
Must I lie there quietly
And let him think me dead?

Summer

INTERLUDE

The summer day has left me free
To note the markings of the bee;

The lush mechanics of the rose,
How it is dyed and how it grows;

To watch, from leafy ambuscade,
The mansion that the squirrel has made.

I have the time to ponder why
The robin and the butterfly

May go with wings, the worm with none;
How buried seed can find the sun,

To guess the reason dust and sod
Should be the avenue to God.

SUNFLOWER HEDGE

Here has sprung beauty,
Where beauty died:
Clytie's old sorrow,
Lined, multiplied;

Clytie's old sorrow,
Rooted and stemmed,
Love rash and deathless,
Fire-diademed;

Asking no pity
For a sharp pain
(Swords of the sunshine),
But tears of rain;

Beauty resurgent
Where beauty died:
Clytie's old sorrow,
Lined, multiplied.

HILL SONGS

1

The meadow-lilies' bright bells hang,
Tight calyxed in pale green,
Awaiting, on a daggered stalk,
The summer's slow routine.

The unripe huckleberries, strung
Like turquoise on a stem,
Take toll of an insistent sun,
That warmly ripens them.

But treason flares in beauty's path;
A full month yet from bloom,
The Judas-buds of goldenrod
Kiss summer to her doom.

2

I had forgotten all these things,
Before I found the hills again;
I had forgotten coral-bells,
And pye-weed, heavy with the rain.

I did not pause to think that flame
Of culver-root would burn so white;
Or gentian-cup, fringe aureoled,
Could lift a draught of blue delight.

The crooked roads, the meadow trail,
I had forgotten all of these;
For little schemes and smaller men,
I had betrayed the hills and trees.

GARDEN FLOWER

The years have bound her in a circled wall;
Imprisoned fast in beauty's narrow close,
She measures time by greening blade, and fall
Of crimson leaf, the daffodil and rose.
Ever, at call of summer, she will sway
In sanctuary, harbored and discreet;
One of a patterned, colorful array,
The turf a mossy rug before her feet.

Give her no blame, if she can only look
Two ways, if she observe but grass and sky;
Grant, to her perfume, tolerance; and brook
Her perishable loveliness . . . Decry
A flower if you will: it shall be bound
By tenuous root, to beauty and the ground.

BRIEF GODS

He has been bred on callous steel, and drew
His milk from out a breast of storied rock;
His playground was a fevered avenue,
His lullaby a city's noise and shock.
Small wonder that he finds the burgeoning
Of beauty in a lighted cabaret;
That star and flower bloom alike in string
Of garish bulbs along a sparkling way.

Pity him that he bends to gods of steel,
Brief gods that ultimately must comply
To older lords, the grass and earth, which seal
Beneath them, tyrants helpless to deny
The spider weaving lace from fallen stone . . .
Or flowers creviced on an empty throne.

PRISONED BIRD

He sits alert within a cage,
  And decorates the days
With all the song he scattered once
  Along the summer ways;

Beholden for the gift of seed
  That, on the wing, he took
From weed and flower, for the drink
  He borrowed from the brook.

He knows no minor melody
  To paint the prison-days,
But sings the song he scattered once
  Along the summer ways.

LINES FOR A BLIND GIRL

To H.A.K.

Watch her, watch her as she goes
Down the garden path to find,
Touch and smell the morning rose;
Watch—and never call her blind.

Follow, follow in the trail
Of her feet, while finger-eyes
Flutter by her side as frail,
Quick and gay as butterflies.

Wary, wary, lest your heart
Break—oh, leave her as the light
Fades, for she will draw apart,
Knowing coolness for the night.

Leave her, leave her, buried deep
(Silence and a blackened nook),
Lest you hear her fingers creep
On the pages of a book.

JOURNEY OF ANGER

A thunderbolt has cut its wrath
Upon the beauty of this tree;
Then merged its fury with the earth
And buried it eternally.

But ever, ever shall that stark
Journey of anger leave its mark.

THE DEAF

The clamorous world has ebbed and left them high
Upon a soundless shore, that may not know
The speech of motion; for the bird must fly
With a remembered mute arpeggio.
This is a world unalterably hewn
From silence, and upon that quiet reef,
The bees hum still and unforgotten tune,
In summer fields of pollen-cup and leaf.

But here is yet communion for locked ear:
The perfumed epic of the speechless rose
Is plain to them; and they alone may hear
The tale that star and butterfly disclose;
While love itself, with language quite apart
From uttered word, may speak from heart to heart.

POET'S CHILD

You that besiege the womb to live,
This is the heritage I give:

Sharp rock for stumbling feet, unrest,
Always a sword against the breast;

Heaven more high and stars that run
Steeper in course, a fiercer sun;

Love that drinks deeply, still accurst,
Starving on bread, crying with thirst;

And at the end, a lonely rood,
Marked in a crowd for solitude . . .

One death to die . . . and one to live:
This is the heritage I give.

He has his tragic counterpart in days
Of long ago, this eager malcontent,
Who walks deliberately in the ways
Of dangerous questioning and bold dissent.
He scourges, with the passion of his tongue,
The bloated money-changer; prods the loose
Jerkin of comfort, draws the curtain hung
On dangling skeletons of old abuse.
He will not see the certain paths that wind
Into a troubled garden; nor the hate
And treachery that ultimately find
Their Caiaphas to seal a martyr-fate:
The dark, dark victory a rebel goad
Brings to the man who walks unbroken road.

Her days were placid pools of light and dark,
Withdrawn from fret of broom and cluttered bed;
She fired the commonplace with beauty's spark,
Weaving a dream in warp of colored thread.
No wall could hold her; only earth and stone,
Leaf-checkered, where she gleaned the aftermath
Of sun and rain . . . awaiting here alone,
Familiar foot-steps on a garden path.
What was there, in a fiery rebel heart,
That lured her from a beauty so complete,
To watch him as he walked a road apart
From hers . . . to kneel and listen at his feet?
Was it but wonder at a great unrest,
Or answering call, deep-hidden in her breast?

NEVER SHALL THE FLAMES THAT BURN . . .

Never shall the flames that burn
In this breast,
Die down and turn

Meekly into sods that close
Root of willow
Or of rose.

Rather shall they sear the stem
Blindly asking
Food of them,

Burning—upward, high and higher—
Seeking flame
To blend with fire.

MUCH AS ANY GOD

I must cease to fumble
At forbidden locks;
Count the moments passing
On relentless clocks.

Surely a forever
Is not very far;
I can catch a light-beam
Falling from a star.

I can touch a secret,
Much as any God,
Clasping thumb and finger
On a growing sod.

I must drown a clock-song
If I would be free;
I must leave a blind wall,
Let a fast lock be.

SHADOW

(*Words in Farewell*)

I have cut
Your clinging hand
From my own;
The tender band,

Holding me
To shallow ways,
Quiet nights,
And little days;

I have left,
In smoother sweet
Meadow-paths,
Your fragile feet.

Now forget . . .
The shadow cast
On summer lane
Is quickly past.

ENVY

I envy her whose hour falls,
Content within four sheltering walls;
Who asks, to warm her life, no more
Than sun or fire-light on a floor.

I envy her who walks a way,
Hedge-closed and windless, day by day;
A little flowered lane whose end
Is quiet clasp of friend with friend.

For, oh, I weary of the road,
The wind, the ever-pricking goad;
The jagged lonely heights that run
Their callous peaks into the sun.

Autumn

AUTUMN WORDS

Man with the rake,
Let the leaf lie,
Let the leaf curl,
Wither and dry.

It is absurd
Trying to scratch
Sorrow of trees
Into a patch.

Let the wind have
Crisp words of grief;
Let the snow pack,
Hold down the leaf.

Man with the rake,
Let the leaf go,
Drift with the wind,
Lie with the snow.

AS ONCE TO PAN . . .

So delicate is love,
I fear to grasp
It tightly,
Lest it turn within my clasp,
Like Syrinx,
Into wands of swaying reed,
That could but pipe
To sighing of my breath,
As once to Pan,
A song of love—in death.

COUNTRY WALK

Silence—silence,
Cool, complete;
But the noise
Of crunching feet,
On the graveled
Dusty ground,
Breaks the quiet
With its sound.

Cautiously
The birds compete
With the crunching
Of the feet,
Piercing silverly
Profound
Wood-calm with
A liquid sound.

Silence—silence,
Cool, complete;
But the noise
Of crunching feet,
On the graveled
Dusty ground,
Chorused with
The cricket's sound.

GOLD FINCHES

Silently the autumn clock
Gives a notice to the flock;
Quickened petals crown a stem,
Clytie's withered diadem.

Here a thistle's sharp defense
Grants reluctant recompense
To the greedy multitude
Of a fluttering golden brood;

Winged marauders that demand
Summer's harvest, wisely planned;
Taking fill of autumn-loot,
Rob the waiting earth of fruit;

Feathered flowers of the fall,
Swooping . . . swaying on the tall
Bending stalk of brittle weed,
Blossom alchemied to seed.

WASH DAY

Like marionettes,
From pole and trees,
Family secrets
Float in the breeze:

Patches and poverty,
Quickened with air;
Garments for skeletons,
Rudely laid bare;

Pride's silken petticoat,
Flaunts in the face
Of sorrow's mantle,
Ruffles and lace.

Lyrics of childhood,
Strung one by one,
Like flower necklaces,
Sway in the sun;

Rich man and poor man,
Heavy—light heart,
Only a frail fence
Keeps them apart;

Romance . . . and tragedy
Threadbare and thinned,
Whispered through ages,
Blown by the wind.

HILL MAN

With the slow-passing years, he had become
  One with a soil that he had tilled and tended,
Browned and enduring, weather-beaten, dumb.
  At rise of sun his days began; and ended,
Each day alike, close to the breast of earth;
  Save that, to bring him near remoter heaven,
He mutely suffered unaccustomed dearth
  Of sky and soil, one idle day in seven.

When he had said, to an unvisioned God,
  Remembered lines, he could but dully stare,
In irksome tire, across a furrowed sod;
  His wistful look a still, unconscious prayer
That death might bring to him but rest from toil,
  And quiet mingling with familiar soil.

MARKET PLACE

Row on row,
  Stretch busy stalls;
Meat hangs crimson
  From the walls;

Brimming baskets,
  Boxes hold,
Globes of scarlet,
  Brown and gold;

People hurrying
  To and fro . . .
Buying food
  Concerns them so.

They forget
  The desert where
One lived well
  On raven's fare;

They forget
  The manna-bough,
Who are buying
  Flesh-pots now.

FEUD

Their hate, a fanged and bitter thing,
Lulled by a mutual grief, had slept.
Like a long-dormant serpent now
It writhed within their hearts; and crept,
Reluctantly, a little stiff
And cold, to its accustomed place;
Where, quickened by old fire, each saw
It coil upon the other's face.

MOLE

Earth for a floor
(Above—below)
He uses a door
We all will know;
With never a ray,
Nor chink to mark
The night from day,
The day from dark;
With never a light
But a star on his nose,
He battles the night
Beneath the rose.

The thunderous sound
Of my footfall,
Vibrates the ground
Above his wall.
Through a blacker night,
Blind, groping, I
(With never a light
But a sun in the sky)
Above the black bed
Where he slips,
Must move, a dread
Apocalypse.

NOW THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO TELL . . .

Now there is nothing left for us to tell,
Of love or friendship . . . but an empty shell;

A brittle wall that holds a loose deceit,
A castanet of dark and withered meat.

Though we may hoard, against a winter dearth,
This shell in flaming shroud of autumn earth,

The squirrel, Time, will find the nut we hide,
Crack it . . . and throw the bitter meat aside.

POPLAR

She kept her branches folded up,
Each pointing to the sky;
And not a single leaf or twig
Was ever turned awry.

A poplar tree can prod the soul,
But it was never made
As lure for lovers, plighting troth,
To lie within its shade.

The heart or tree that points a star
Must always stand aloof;
Nor may its folded branches lean
To shadowing a roof.

ARMOR

The sorrow of it was,
Not that grief found her,
But the iron case
It wrapped around her.

A dark heart alone,
In an armored city,
Locking in tears, . . .
Shutting out pity.

ASHES

Her garden called perennially to youth,
So flaunting were its colors. There was phlox,
In massed enticement of deep rose and white,
That followed the mad passion of the holly-
hocks.
Then, as if flesh and flame were not enough,
There was the recklessness of tawney, tall,
Black-hearted tiger lilies; and again, at fall,
Beside her fence, the warm alluring fire
Of goldenglow. She was but spent desire,
Gray ash against the daring of it all . . .
Color seemed not to be a part of her,
Who moved amidst it, fragile, twilight-hued,
And faintly redolent of lavender.

DOWN IN THE HOLLOW

If you wish to find
Her house, you must follow
The wooded mountain road
That leads to the hollow.

Living in the hills,
From rise to set of sun,
She sees no misty peak
Beside a paler one.

From the set of sun,
To its next glowing rise,
No line of purple hills
Against evening skies.

Wash—clean—bake—
So heavy is her load,
She has no time to walk
The little mountain road.

Day dawns after day;
And night drops to swallow
Each day—and day alike,
Lost in a hollow.

RIME

Briefly I was spring,
Knowing love and pain,
Fluent as the wind,
Mobile as the rain.

Summer doomed the pride,
Begging but to pass;
Now I am the rime,
On a window-glass.

WINTER

RED BIRD

Who shall dare
To be the red
Flower on the heart
Of the dead;

To flute the brave
Arpeggio,
Above a crystal
Shroud of woe?

DEFIANCE

Underneath her hair, as white
As driven snow that lies
On winter's frozen bosom, burned
The summer of her eyes;

And over seamed and furrowed flesh,
Where age had been at grips
With waning youth, there ran the red
Defiance of her lips.

POTTED PLANT

Her scant and hungry leafage, foiled
But for a sunny interval,
Arose from roots that vainly coiled
Against a closing wall.

Glassed from the anger of the storm,
Upon a narrow casement-edge,
A winter promise glowed as warm,
As spring and summer pledge.

Her budded dreams came into flower,
Fed on a seepage from the noon;
And slept a black uneasy hour,
Walled from the stars and moon.

GOLD FISH

Within a wall of glass they slip,
Past rocky lilliputian ledges;
Coldly incurious, they lip
The rounded crystal edges.

Eventlessly, their journeys mark,
With geometric unconcern,
A history in glowing arc,
And iridescent counter-turn.

So glittering thru the circled days,
Their thoughts of much or little matter,
Chain upward into bubbled phrase,
To break against the air and shatter.

LINES FOR A MOUSE

Now dusk blindfolds a world, the lamp is lit;
Thoughts or a book companion thinning day,
The glare of actual hour fades away
To phantoms grown unreal . . . indefinite . . .
And, from the quiet corner where I sit,
A thought, a shadow, silent-footed . . . gray . . .
Inscrutable, adventures to survey
My world, a night's allotted perquisite.

Stilly he drifts, and dreams of cheese; while I
Dream lesser things, old love . . . residuum
Of a green spring, old hungers that decry
Less than a loaf; blind to the scattered crumb
That serves, wee friend, to royally supply
The dream for you, and round its little sum.

ARISTOCRAT

She sips life daintily from flowered cups,
Her fingers curving on a silver spoon;
Nibbles at love like one who coldly sups
On bits of green cheese from a gelid moon.
The nicety of linen and of lace,
The crystal sheen of glass are her concern;
And life gives back to her, in mirrored grace,
A stately image in a polished urn.

Rich hangings dull the clamor of the years.
The red insistence of a pulsing world
Is drowned in pretty chatter; and the ears,
Deaf to anathemas that gods have hurled
On bric-a-brac, must still subordinate
Earth's cry to click of silver upon plate.

CONVIVIAL

Now candles flicker warm, and wine is red;
The knot of life undoes itself, and lies
A simple loop a careless child unties;
And hunger may be eased at last by bread.
Come, laughter is a yielding mistress, led
By loosened lip and confidential eyes!
Laugh, write the dark page over and revise
The calumny: a dream we dreamt is dead.

Laugh, for the morning is a thing of gray
And cloudy memories. . . . Where is the quip
That ridiculed the sigh of yesterday?
The dregs lie in the glass, and but the drip
Of smoky tallow marks the disarray
Of laughter's night . . . a jest on sullen lip.

CAGED EAGLE

He beats a breast against the bars,
That breasted once the sun and stars;

He sulks beneath a metal sky,
Who had the winds to measure by;

With eyes, unwinking, cold, that scan
The little staring puppet, man,

Who found him in the heaven-ways,
And circumscribed his aerie days . . .

Who calls him, dreaming men are free,
The symbol of his liberty.

STEEPLED FINGERS

I am far
Too blind to tell
Much of heaven,
Or of hell;

But with knee
To board or sod,
I can have
The ear of God;

Steepled fingers,
Palm to palm,
Gain a meed
Of fire or calm;

Through a murky
Curtain, see
Fringes
Of eternity . . .

But I am
Too blind to tell
More of heaven,
Or of hell.

CHRISTMAS PINE

This fragrant tree, whose burning fruit
  Pricks darkness, globed and glittering,
Jewelled like a gaudy prostitute,
  Last year lit tapers to the spring.

Cool as a virgin, proud and tall,
  She lured the hermit-thrush to rest
And loose his rippling waterfall
  Of music from her steepled crest;

And she who wore the evening star
  (Pendant with sparkling trinkets now),
Could pin the new moon's scimitar
  Upon the plumage of her bough.

I TRY REMEMBERING

Sometimes I try remembering
The bitter words that we two said,
Alone beside a dying fire,
A day so long since dead;

And though I still can sense the pain
Of all we spoke in that brief black
Encounter, but a scattered word . . .
A broken phrase comes back.

Yet I remember well the cup
That held your cold untasted tea,
Your crooked image on the tall
Brass pot in front of me;

And I remember your hard eye
Upon me, as I coolly ate
The buttered toast, your hand that toyed
With crumbs upon a plate;

The dropped tea-napkin like a tent
That lay, fringe-downward, on the floor;
And, oh, I wish I might forget
The slam of a closed door. . . .

The airy way the curtains rushed
Before the wind blown into them . . .
And the absurdly small ripped place
That showed along their hem.

SONG FOR WINTER

I must be as the pin-oak for a season,
Holding a summer's bronze memorial leaf;
Clinging tenaciously without a reason,
To warped and brittle syllables of grief.

There are no voices in the silent branches
Whose crooked forks still obdurately hold
The rounded hungry nest; and winter blanches
Spring's skeleton, and gives it to the cold.

I must not loose the tattered ghost of summer,
The wraith of beauty that a year has thinned,
Nor give my grief to any idle comer . . .
A tale to drift . . . and die upon the wind.

WINDY HILL

She kept her love
Close to her breast;
Her faith was packed
In a locked chest.

On Sundays one
Went out to air;
She never left
The other bare.

Now warm she sips
Her love like tea,
She folds her faith
Down tenderly;

And looks askance,
Because I hold
My rags so tight,
Against the cold.

O windy hill,
How can she know
Where faith can stray,
Where love can go?

GALL AND BLACK BREAD

This is the hill-top
  That I sought,
And these the things
  The climb has bought:

A leaf of laurel,
  New red wine,
And snow-white bread . . .
  All these are mine.

But an old hunger,
  I thought dead,
Still prays for gall
  And hard black bread.

SNOW-FLAKE

The end of sorrow
Will be this:
The flake of snow,
The muted kiss,

That fallen whitely
Earthward, must
Take quietly
The toll of dust.